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after the manner of the heathen, out of their own hearts. (2 Kgs. xvii. 17; Jer. xiv. 14; Ezek. xiii. 7.) They followed their own spirit, and were like foxes in the waste places. They went not up into the gaps, neither made up the fence for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord. (Ezek. xiii. 5.) Not so with the prophets the records of whose ministries we study, and like unto whom, in all essential respects, God grant that we may be.

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## THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSONS.

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### FEB. 13. GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM. Gen. xv. 5-18.

Professor Künen (*Hexateuch*, original pages 141, 314, etc.) holds that this account is made up of two previous accounts, with some later additions. First, there was a narrative, now represented by verses 2-4, 5, 6, 13-16, which told of an interview of Jehovah with Abram by night, Jehovah promising him an heir and a numerous seed. There was another narrative, now represented by verses 7-11, 12, 17, which told of an interview in the afternoon, of Jehovah's promising an inheritance to Abram, and of a sacrifice and covenant. A compiler roughly pieced these two narratives together. Some centuries later, an editor worked into the narrative a few such phrases as "who shall come forth from thy bowels," "great substance," "good old age" (verses 4, 14, 15), with the limit of time to the "fourth generation," verse 16. Still later some subsequent editor introduced the contradictory time-statement, the 400 years of verse 13, and either introduced or extended the list of nations, verses 19-21. Of the alleged peculiar expressions, the word *rakush*, substance, is limited in use to Genesis, Exodus, and the latest Old Testament books; the others have no such limit.

This is a very complicated way of accounting for the phenomena presented, and the complexity of it increases when we examine the details. One who holds that the chapter now stands substantially as it was originally written has at hand explanations of the phenomena which are at once much simpler and much more complete. The transaction took some time, the beginning of the interview being at night, and the sacrifice taking place in the afternoon of a subsequent day. The author represented Jehovah as promising to Abram both an heir and an inheritance, the two being thought of and spoken of together. The most natural interpretation of the 400 years makes it to be a round number, describing a period closing about 400 years from the time when the words were spoken, while the fourth generation would be counted from the time of the beginning of the sojourn of Israel in Egypt; the two time-statements, therefore, are consistent, and both are correct. An earlier author was just as likely as a later to give a longer list of nations than usual. The word *rakush* can be accounted for as an early word, revived by the late writers who use it, they being close students of the Pentateuch. The other phraseology that is here cited as peculiar to the style of the priestly narrator is not thus peculiar, but belongs to the current Hebrew of the earlier times.

The 400 years of this chapter elsewhere appears as exactly 430 years, Exod. XII. 40, 41; Gal. III. 17. My own opinion is that the 430 years begins with Abram's coming from Haran to Palestine, and therefore that just half of the time had expired before Jacob went to Egypt to sojourn. The four generations in Egypt may be represented by the names of Kohath, Amram, Aaron, and Eleazar, or by those of Levi, Kohath, Amram, Aaron. In any case, they are not human generations of average length, but generations of exceptionally long-lived men, the four covering a period of 215 years.

The word *believed*, in verse 6, is of great theological interest. The New Testament doctrine of faith comes back to this verse as its principal original instance.

In verses 1 and 4, the phrase "word of Jehovah" is used in describing the divine message to Abram, just as it would be used in the case of any prophet. Undoubtedly, the intention is to attribute to Abram the possession of the prophetic gift. It is said in verse 1 that the word of Jehovah came to Abram "in the vision," the word for vision being *machazeh*. Writers say that the derivatives of *chazah* and of *ra'ah* are used interchangeably in describing the visions of Jehovah's prophets. It would be more correct to say that they are sometimes used in the same passages, and that both are used of prophetic gifts, and as synonyms for the words that denote prophesying. *Ra'ah* is the ordinary word for physical beholding, while *chazah* properly denotes either mental sight, or thoughtful, observant seeing. When the words are applied to prophetic vision, the radical difference never wholly disappears. Visions that are conceived of as appealing to the external eye are described by the words of the stem *ra'ah*; the words of the stem *chazah* are either used generically, or specify visions of insight. The few apparent exceptions to this rule will be found, on examination, to confirm the rule. In the present chapter, for instance, if either word were used to describe Abraham's beholding of the fire that passed between the parts of the sacrifice, it would be a word from *ra'ah*. The word vision in verse 1 either describes the whole transaction, including the appearing of the fire, or else describes the beginning of the transaction as a revelation to Abraham by insight, and not by external vision.

#### FEB. 20. ABRAHAM PLEADING FOR SODOM. Gen. XVIII. 23-33.

The Old Testament view of Jehovah's mode of communicating with a man who had the gift of prophecy is better illustrated in these parts of the history of Abraham than in almost any other portion of Scripture. The modes of divine revelation to the prophets are commonly classified, I believe, as three: by dreams, by visions, and by direct communication. It follows more closely the language of the Bible to say by dreams, by external visions real or apparent, by mental vision. The highest mode of revelation is through that form of external vision which may be called theophany—Jehovah appearing in human form and conversing with a man, as in the instance in the present lesson, or Jehovah's uttering words to men from the midst of some splendid manifestation of his presence, as in the instance of the burning bush, or of the giving of the ten commandments from Sinai.

Of the first of these two kinds of theophany the lesson gives the most detailed instance we have. Note the following points concerning it. First, it purports to be an account of Jehovah's appearing to Abraham, verse 1. Secondly, Abraham saw three men, verse 2. Thirdly, he addressed one of them for the three, verse 3 seq.; according to the Massoretic pointing, he recognized the one as Jehovah. Fourthly, "they ate"—apparently all three of them, verse 8. Fifthly, one of the

three was Jehovah, and talked with Abraham both about himself and Sarah and about Sodom, verses 10, 13, 17, 22, 33, etc. Sixthly, the other two of the three men went toward Sodom, and are evidently "the two angels" whom Lot entertained there, verse 22 and XIX. 1, 5, 10, etc. There can be no doubt that we have here the description of Jehovah and two angels, in the form of three men, and an account of a conversation between Jehovah in this form and Abraham. In the parallel cases, sometimes one angel appears in the form of a man, and presently turns out to be Jehovah himself.

The theophanies of the Old Testament should be studied, both for their connection with the New Testament doctrine of the Incarnation, and for the light they throw on all points connected with the claims to divine authority made by the ancient prophets.

#### FEB. 27. DESTRUCTION OF SODOM. Gen. XIX. 15-26.

Our current traditions locate the cities of the plain within the present area of the Dead Sea, and generally in the southern and shallower part of it. But the line of march of the four kings, Gen. XIV., is inconsistent with this, and the opinion now best received is that the cities were to the north of the sea, in the deep Jordan valley.

It is still commonly held that the destruction of the cities was by miracle. It can be very plausibly accounted for, however, by purely natural causes. It is a rock oil region, and on the edge of a geological "fault." The sudden sinking of a tract of land, causing vast quantities of inflammable fluids to spurt upwards, with the ignition of these fluids, and their fall upon the devoted cities, would be phenomena not unlikely to happen in that locality; and if this happened, how could it be better described than by saying that "Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from with Jehovah from the heaven?" such a use of providential means for accomplishing moral purposes is a more wonderful act of God than is any miracle. And in any case the saving of Lot and his family was by miracle.

When Lot went out of his house to face the mob in Sodom, he proved himself to be a man of physical courage. The Bible always speaks of him as a just man. I must think that the current interpretation of verses 7 and 8 does him injustice. Lot did not propose to compromise with the mob by sacrificing the honor of his daughters, but reasoned with them by the argument that they might as well ask him to consent to the dishonor of his daughters as to that of his guests.

The phrase "and he lingered," verse 16, gives the true key to the weakness in Lot's character which caused his failure in life. He had a habit of hesitating when he ought to have been acting. He lacked decision of purpose. If he had been more decided in his control of his servants, doubtless he and Abraham need not have parted. He showed an undecided, compromising spirit when he "tented as far as Sodom," XIII. 12, and finally became a resident there. From the story of Lot in Sodom, teach the importance of promptly saying "No" to temptation, and promptly saying "Yes" to duty.

#### MARCH 6. ABRAHAM OFFERING ISAAC. Gen. XXII. 1-14.

By what mode of communication Jehovah told Abraham to offer Isaac, we are not informed. The interference at the mountain was apparently by a theophany, in which the one speaking to Abraham is called both the angel of Jehovah and Jehovah, though this is not quite so clear in this case as in some other cases.

In verse 14, we get the clearest meaning if we translate "In the Mountain of Jehovah he will appear." This is one great lesson of the incident. Jehovah did not appear in theophany for Abraham's relief before Abraham started, nor while he was on the way, but after he had reached the mountain, and proceeded to the last extreme in obeying the command laid upon him. Similar facts were true in the experience of the men who framed the proverb. Jehovah sometimes delays appearing for our relief until we are in the last extremity, in the Mountain of Jehovah. Those who reason that we have in this "Mountain of Jehovah" an allusion to Solomon's temple, and therefore a proof that the book was written after Solomon's time draw a baseless conclusion.

No one should fail to notice that, in the successive incidents from which the lessons are taken the soteriological aspect of the call of Abraham, the thought that he and his seed are to be the channel of God's blessing to all mankind, is constantly kept in the foreground, as the principal doctrine taught in regard to God's relations with men, Gen. XVIII. 18, XXII. 18, etc.

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## AN EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH LIII. 11, 12.

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The two verses closing this remarkable chapter were spoken by God the Father. The prophet's words in the preceding ten verses show, Godward, the humiliation of the God-man; and the imputation of human sin, equal to an indictment against Him; and manward, a trial of Jesus. A court on earth has tried him on the pretence of treason, and sentenced him to death upon the demand of the people, though judicially declared innocent. A court in heaven seems to be now convened, because of the permitted execution of this death sentence, and because great results, *REACHING THROUGH ETERNITY*, are to issue in benefit to man and glory to God; and a compensating reward is promised to the God-man, Sufferer and Mediator. The Judge of this heavenly court renders a decision which is summed up in these two verses.

Paraphrased they may be made to say: Verse 11, Because of the grief of his soul he shall see, in answer to the question, "Who shall declare his generation?" that which you, Isaiah, just now predicted (verse 10), "a seed," which shall "prolong its days," and he shall be satisfied fully and eternally therewith. On his acknowledgment, or confession [with love is implied], of "the multitudes" of this seed, he, the Father, as a judicial verdict, will pronounce it fit and proper to impute the righteousness of his servant to these multitudes, seeing that he himself shall bear their iniquities. Verse 12: Therefore I will apportion to him "on account of these multitudes," "and with numerous ones" [not strong, except as to numbers] shall he divide a spoil, because that he poured out his soul unto death and was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and for the transgressors he shall make intercession [the verb is properly in the future] as long as there is any need, i. e., through this economy and that of the millennium, until the perfect state beyond comes, when intercession shall be no longer needed. The Tree of Life will be then accessible, and its leaves shall be for the service [not healing] of the nations then existing (Rev. XXII. 2).